

Real Estate eNews

Design-It-Yourself Software

Some do-it-yourselfers aren't happy until they truly do it all themselves, right down to the interior and exterior redesign of the fixer-upper they purchase or a smaller remodeling project. For these confident remodelers, as well as for new homeowners who just want to try their hand at redesigning a single room, a variety of home and landscape design software packages can help bring these plans to life. The programs allow users to control all phases of a design or redesign, from room size and shape, to plumbing and ventilation.



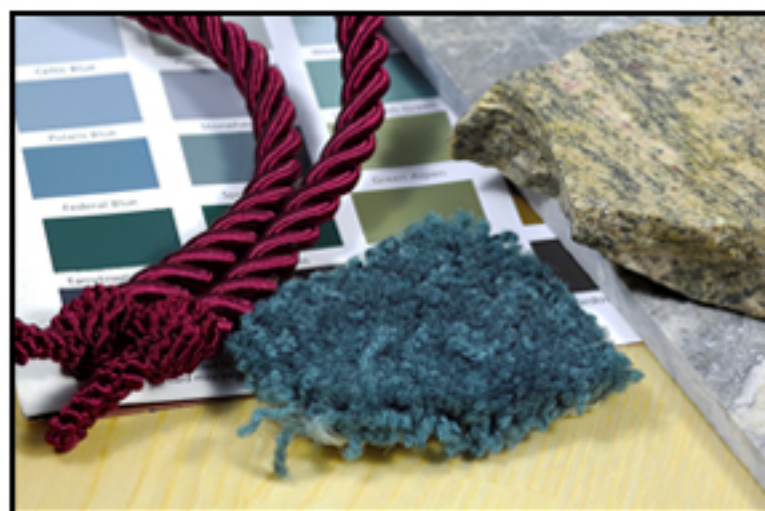
Why do these programs appeal to experienced builders and novices alike? First, they are much easier to use than early versions of architectural CAD (computer-aided design) programs. The newer software, with names like Home and Landscape Design (Punch Software), Home Designer Suite (Chief Architect), Total 3D Home Design Deluxe (Individual Software, Inc) and others allow users to access simple tools, such as a click-and-drag system, to create designs. With basic computer skills, a homeowner can sit in front of a computer and within a few minutes begin to formulate floor plans, set up a walk-through or find the right plants for the soil and climate conditions. Then the homeowner can examine their designs in 2-D or 3-D.



While it sounds complicated, most program interfaces are designed to be easy to use, from the drag tool used to add walls and cabinets, to the aesthetic tool, used to add household objects such as furniture and appliances. For those with experience and expertise, many of the software packages also include electrical, plumbing and HVAC options, allowing the user to specify the exact details of one or all of these systems.

What can you do besides add doors, walls and closets to a floor plan? In most programs, the user will find thousands of textures to choose to apply on any surface created; from carpet to bricks, and wallpaper to wood floors. A myriad of fabrics, colors, flooring and wall coverings are available to create the desired look.

No details escape notice in these software programs. It's not just a ceiling when you use the click and drag tool, it's a ceiling with beams or crown molding. Wainscoting and base trim in all colors and stains are included, and if the user is planning a new design for a vacation or second home, they can draw log walls and ceilings for that mountain retreat.



Once plans are created, the files can be saved to the hard drive, printed, emailed to interior designers, contractors or architects, or made into blueprints.

Since there are multiple products on the market, here are some ways to evaluate the offerings. Features to look for include ease of use, even for an inexperienced designer. The program's product literature or website should give a description of intended users, and on-line reviews can provide further information as to the ease of use of any of the available software packages. In addition to the product being easy to use, its installation should be uncomplicated as well. Help documentation should be thorough, offering step-by-step instructions in simple, easy-to-understand language, and help should also be available by phone.